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# Employee preferences for coaching behaviors

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# EMPLOYEE PREFERENCES FOR COACHING BEHAVIORS

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Psychology

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Brian T. Hall

April, 2001

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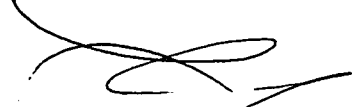
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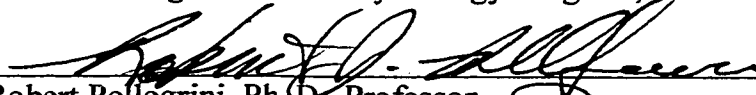
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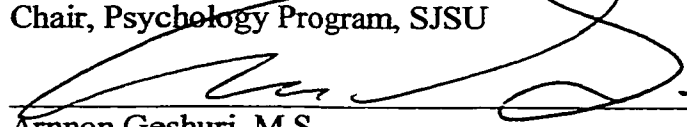
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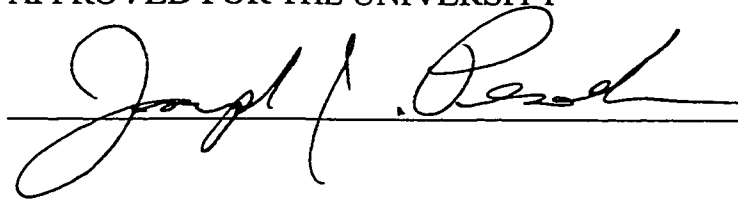


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## ABSTRACT

### EMPLOYEE PREFERENCES FOR COACHING BEHAVIORS

by Brian T. Hall

This study explored the differences in employee preferences for coaching behaviors based on employee gender and level of experience. Sixty-nine employees completed a survey designed to measure preferences for three types of coaching behaviors. No significant differences between male and female employees were found. Significant results revealed that female employees had a stronger preference for coaching behaviors related to on-the-job performance as compared to coaching behaviors related to relationships and employee development. A significant difference revealed that employees with more than 10 years of experience had a stronger preference than employees with less than 10 years of experience for coaching behaviors focused on building and maintaining working relationships. The findings from this study indicate that not all employees have the same preferences for coaching behaviors. Recommendations are provided on how managers can tailor their management style to better meet the needs of their employees.



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**Employee Preferences for Coaching Behaviors**

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**Running head: COACHING BEHAVIORS**

### Abstract

This study explored the differences in employee preferences for coaching behaviors based on employee gender and level of experience. Sixty-nine employees completed a survey designed to measure preferences for three types of coaching behaviors. No significant differences between male and female employees were found. Significant results revealed that female employees had a stronger preference for coaching behaviors related to on-the-job performance as compared to coaching behaviors related to relationships and employee development. A significant difference revealed that employees with 10 or more years of experience had a stronger preference than employees with less than 10 years of experience for coaching behaviors focused on building and maintaining working relationships. The findings from this study indicate that not all employees have the same preferences for coaching behaviors. Recommendations are provided on how managers can tailor their management style to better meet the needs of their employees.

### Employee Preferences for Coaching Behaviors

The way a manager behaves within an organization has a direct impact on subordinates' behaviors and their perceptions of the work environment (Bass, 1985). As a result, a considerable amount of research has been conducted to better understand the effects different management and leadership behaviors have on employees. Studies have consistently shown that employees' job satisfaction (Burke, 1995; Grasso, 1994; Castaneda & Nahavandi, 1991), productivity (Rodgers & Hunter, 1991; Slater, 1989), perception of organizational climate (Schuster, Dunning, Morden, Hagan, Baker, & McKay, 1997; Daniel, 1985), rate of absenteeism (Zaccaro & Quinn, 1991), organizational commitment (Zeffane, 1994), and creativity (Redmond & Mumford, 1993) are significantly influenced by managers' behaviors. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about employees' preferences for a specific set of management behaviors associated with a coaching style of management.

Manager behaviors are typically studied within the context of different management and leadership styles. According to Kast and Rosenzweig (1985), managerial style is defined as the "distinctive manner in which a manager behaves as constrained by organizational culture and guided by personal philosophy" (p. 669). Hersey and Blanchard (1977) define leadership style as the pattern of behavior a manager uses as he or she attempts to influence subordinates toward organizational accomplishments. In Baron and Greenberg's (1990) overview of leadership theory they credit Ralph Stoghill and Rensis Likert as the primary researchers who helped distinguish two key dimensions or styles of leadership. The first dimension is referred to as

“consideration” and is characterized as being people-oriented. Leaders who score high on this dimension tend to maintain a style focused on establishing positive working relationships with subordinates. The second dimension is known as “initiating structure” and is more indicative of a production-oriented style. Leaders high on this dimension are primarily interested in production and getting the job done.

According to Daniel (1985), it is possible to define a manager’s style based on these two leadership dimensions: 1) a relationship or people-centered dimension; and 2) a task or production-centered dimension. The extent to which managers favor one dimension over the other is indicative of different styles. The Situational Leadership model developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1977) utilize these two leadership dimensions to describe four distinct leadership styles.

The basic premise of Hersey and Blanchard’s model is that a manager’s style of leadership depends on an employee’s level of experience and the nature of the task or project presented to the employee. When an employee has minimal expertise the most appropriate leadership style is more focused on behaviors related to initiating structure. This first style is characterized as providing high direction and low support to the employee. As the employee gains expertise the model suggests that a manager’s leadership style gradually shift from a directive style to a more supportive style. The second style calls for high directive and high supportive behavior. This style is intended for employees who have not yet mastered the job and still require some direction from managers. At the same time, managers also need to offer the employee support and encouragement to succeed on the job. The third style requires the manager to provide

high supportive and low directive behaviors. At this point employees are more self-reliant on the job and need little direction, but can still benefit from a manager who serves as a sounding board for the employee and provides reassurance if necessary. The final style is most appropriate when the employee is fully capable to take charge and requires little from the manager to succeed on the job. This style is defined by low supportive and low directive behavior.

Although an extensive amount of research has clearly established a link between management styles and a number of job-related variables, one area that has seen little attention in past research has been an investigation into what types of management styles employees prefer. One study with this aim was conducted by Lucas, Messner, Ryan, & Sturm (1992), which was designed to measure both employees' and managers' leadership preferences. This was accomplished by having the subjects rate their ideal leader using the Leader Behavior Descriptive Questionnaire - Form XII. The results from the study indicated that both managers and employees share the same concept of preferred leadership style, which turned out to be a leadership style characterized by high task and high relationship behavior.

### Coaching

The purpose of the following study is to further explore employee preferences for management behaviors by looking specifically at a coaching style of management. For many organizations the term coaching may represent nothing more than a recent organizational fad or an all too common corporate buzzword, while at the same time other organizations may view coaching as a legitimate management style made up of



specific supervisory skills which are capable of increasing employee productivity. The outcome of an extensive review of the coaching literature offers support for both extremes, as well as everything in between.

The link between the business world and the concept of coaching is a relatively new one, especially when compared to the more traditional notion of coaching as it relates to the world of athletics. Back in the 1950s the idea of a manager being a coach for an employee was first associated with the role of a manager during an employee's annual performance review. It was not until the 1970s that the methodologies of athletic coaching appeared applicable to the relationship between managers and employees. To some extent the techniques associated with coaching have always been a part of the business environment, but were described with different words, such as mentoring, career counseling, or employee development (Evered & Selman, 1989).

Whitmore (1994) states the essence of coaching is "unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them" (p.15). Orth, Wilkerson, and Benfari (1987) view coaching as one of the many roles managers are expected to play. They define coaching as the hands-on process of assisting employees in the enhancement of performance and capabilities by recognizing opportunities for improvement. A similar definition is provided by Peterson and Hicks (1996) who define coaching as the "process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective" (p. 14). The common element in each of these definitions is a focus on increasing employees' capabilities to enhance their own skills and performance.

Case and Kleiner (1993) do not necessarily consider coaching to be a method of management, but more a combination of several different tactics or techniques aimed at helping employees maximize their potential. Training, employee development programs, goal setting, discipline, employee participation, and group discussion problem solving are some examples of the different tactics considered to be related to coaching. Hillman, Schwandt, and Bartz (1990) also do not see coaching as a management style, but rather as a part of an organization's performance management process. In this process coaching represents the assistance given by supervisors when feedback indicates that performance needs to improve.

Evered and Selman (1989) view coaching much more than just a set of tactics or skills, they describe coaching as the enabling force behind a shift from a management paradigm defined by control to a new paradigm shaped by empowerment. As such, they define coaching as the managerial activity of creating the climate, environment, and context that empowers employees to generate results. Evered and Selman draw a key distinction between what a coaching style of management requires as compared to other styles in the following, "Coaching requires a more interrelated and dynamic vision of organization based more on relationship, commitment, purpose, and results than on role, hierarchical position, prescribed order, and authority" (p. 28). The fundamental difference between coaching and other styles of management is a manager's focus on partnering with employees at both an individual and task level in order to achieve the desired results, as opposed to a manager driving only for results by trying to direct and control an employee's behaviors.

According to Popper and Lipshitz (1992) there are two distinct components of coaching: 1) improving employee performance at the skill level, and 2) building relations in order for the coach to enhance the psychological development of the employee. Popper and Lipshitz maintain that in order for managers to be successful as a coach in the area of this second component they must be able to build self-efficacy within their employees. To do this a manager must perform four tasks in the process of coaching an employee: 1) Identify and define clear parameters of success, 2) Build and structure situations that have potential for success, 3) Identify factors that lead to success, and 4) Identify inner sources of success. When an employee acquires new skills and experience positive outcomes through the application of these skills, the employee's self-efficacy is likely to increase as a result of this experience of success. However, Popper and Lipshitz strongly believe that the only way a coach can build an employee's self-efficacy is through ongoing learning relationships. According to this perspective, coaching is more of a process as opposed to a single event, and it is based on ongoing relations.

#### A Coaching Model

One of the more comprehensive coaching models is presented by Peterson and Hicks (1996), which consists of five inter-related coaching strategies. The first strategy, referred to as "Forge a partnership", focuses on the need to establish a relationship with the employee based on trust and understanding. According to Whitmore (1994), the role trust plays in the coaching process can not be underestimated, without it the manager's ability to effectively coach an employee is seriously jeopardized. One of the key benefits derived from building a relationship based on mutual trust is the increased likelihood that

the guidance and feedback a manager provides to the employee will be acted on (Evered & Selman, 1989; Bielous, 1994).

The second strategy, “Inspire Commitment”, involves the manager’s role of focusing the employee’s attention on the appropriate goals. Part of coaching is the managerial activity of creating an environment and context that empowers employees to generate results (Evered & Selman, 1989). Peterson and Hicks (1990) help to explain this strategy in the following, “You cannot motivate people directly, but you can achieve commitment to development when people understand themselves and the personal payback from working toward organizational objectives” (p.18). Before attention can be focused on enhancing employee skills or increasing levels of employee performance, employees must first be able to see how their development will benefit them and the organization. The significance of Peterson and Hick’s first two strategies are reinforced by Orth, Wilkinson, and Benfari (1987) and Frankel and Otazo (1992), who maintain that without proper relationships in place and employees willing and committed to change, managers have little chance of being effective coaches.

The third strategy, “Grow Skills,” deals with the aspect of coaching focused on developing and enhancing skills within employees. The majority of the coaching literature addresses this strategy by describing the methods, behaviors and techniques a manager must utilize in order to help employees acquire the necessary skills to meet the requirements of the job. Orth, Wilkinson, and Benfari (1987) propose managers have the following four skill sets in order to be effective coaches: 1) Observational skills, 2) Analytical skills, 3) Interviewing skills, and 4) Feedback skills. The observational skills

allow a manager to spot gaps between an employee's level of performance and the performance objectives. The manager's ability to assess employee performance through observation also helps the manager determine if the gaps are the result of a lack of skill or that the employee has the skills but is simply not applying them. Analytical skills are needed to enable the manager to select appropriate opportunities to improve performance by expanding the employee's capabilities. Communication skills are at the root of the interviewing and feedback skills. Managers need to be able to pull information from employees about their experiences on the job by effectively asking the right types of questions at the right times, such as open, closed or reflective questions. And finally, effective feedback skills allow the manager to focus the employee's attention on potentially changeable behavior through the feedback that is specific, descriptive, and direct.

The final two strategies, "Promote Persistence" and "Shape the Environment", help to create and maintain an environment conducive to a coaching style of management. A manager needs to recognize that skill development is not an isolated event, but is a gradual process. By fostering an environment supportive of continuous learning, managers are afforded the opportunity to approach coaching as an evolving process where employee development is encouraged and part of the organizational culture.

### Three Functions of Coaching

The coaching literature reveals that a number of different behaviors are involved in a coaching style of management. Through an assessment of the different coaching

behaviors it is possible to distinguish three main functions of coaching. As pointed out previously, the existence of a trusting relationship between the manager and employee is a critical first step in the coaching process. By engaging in certain types of behaviors a manager can help build a relationship conducive for coaching. The relationship between the employee and the coach can be strengthened when the manager engages in behavior that encourages two way communication, expresses confidence in the abilities and potential of an employee, and displays a genuine interest in the development of the employee (Graham, Wedman, & Garvin, 1993). These types of behaviors help establish positive working relationships with employees, which is a primary function of coaching.

The behaviors a manager displays when working with an employee to increase performance, such as setting clear performance objectives, providing on the spot feedback, and encouraging new ways to accomplish the job, defines an additional function of coaching, which is enhancing on-the-job performance. Coaching behaviors focused on performance do not necessarily mean the employee is failing on the job or has some type of performance deficiency. According to Whitmore (1994), coaching strong performers may involve nothing more than encouraging them to grow new skills and perform at increased levels on the job, which often requires managers to raise the bar for employees and set new expectations for performance.

Increasing the capabilities of employees by focusing on employee development beyond the immediate requirements of the job is a final function of coaching. Similar to coaching for performance, development activities are ultimately intended to increase an employee's level of contribution to the organization. Peterson and Hicks (1996)

advocate the importance of continuous employee development, and suggest managers do not try and link every employee learning activity to the day to day results of the job. Managers can help employees broaden their skills by first working with them to understand their development goals, and the role of a coach is to then be able to link employees' development goals with the business goals.

In summary, a coaching style of management can be seen as having the following three functions: a relationship function, a job performance function, and an employee development function. As managers engage in behaviors consistent with a coaching style of management these three functions become readily apparent.

#### Purpose of Study

Each of these coaching functions plays an important role within a coaching style of management; however, it is unclear if employees have a preference for a particular function. As seen in earlier research, employees have expressed different preferences for management styles, but in the case of a coaching style of management, research has not been conducted in an effort to examine employees' preferences for different coaching behaviors. The focus of this study is to explore employee preferences for coaching behaviors within the context of the three identified functions of coaching. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to determine if preferences for coaching behaviors differ based on employee gender and level of experience.

It has been shown that employees expect male and female managers to display styles consistent with traditional sex-role stereotypes (Ragins, 1991). Russell, Rush and Herd (1988) measured female subjects' expectations of effective male and female

leadership. The results offered general support for the sex role congruency hypothesis, which maintain that the expected behaviors for both an effective male and female leader will be strongly linked to sex role norms. As such, females would be expected to exhibit higher levels of consideration behaviors than a male leader, and a male leader would be expected to engage more in behaviors associated with initiating structure than females. Consistent with the hypothesis, they found female leaders were rated higher than male leaders in consideration behaviors, however, the subjects also expected female leaders to display more initiating structure behaviors compared to male leaders.

Along similar lines, a study by Eagly and Johnson (1990) also established a link between employees' expectations and sex role stereotypes. In their study they found that employees expect female managers to be more democratic and display more of a relationship style, and male managers are expected to be more autocratic with a task-oriented style. Instead of looking at employee expectations, Kushell and Newton (1986) measured employee perceptions of actual leader behavior. The results did not show statistically significant differences based on how subordinates perceived male vs. female leaders, however, female subordinates tended to be more satisfied with leaders of democratically led groups and more dissatisfied with leaders of autocratically led groups as compared to their male counterparts. This difference between male and female employees' level of satisfaction offers additional support for sex role stereotypes. In summary, this leadership research indicates that sex-role norms offer some insight as to why employees have different expectations of male and female leaders, in addition to different levels of satisfaction with particular leadership styles. A gap in this research



exists in that it does not look specifically at gender differences in the area of employee preferences for management behaviors.

Based on these earlier findings, it is believed that gender differences consistent with sex role stereotypes will appear in employees' preferences for coaching. As such, the following two gender-related hypotheses will be tested in this study:

Hypothesis 1 – Male employees will have a stronger preference for performance coaching behaviors compared to coaching behaviors related to relationships and development. However, female employees will have a stronger preference for relationship based coaching behaviors compared to coaching behaviors related to performance and development.

Hypothesis 2 – Male employees will have a stronger preference than female employees for coaching behaviors related to on-the-job performance, and female employees will have a stronger preference than male employees for coaching behaviors related to building and maintaining working relationships.

One additional hypothesis will be tested to explore the relationship between preferred coaching behaviors and employees' level of work experience, irrespective of the employees' gender. Although Yukl (1971) theorized that subordinates' leadership preferences are determined by situational variables in addition to subordinates' personalities, empirical evidence is inconclusive as to whether employee leadership preferences are influenced by such variables (Rice, Instone, & Adams, 1984). This exploration into employee coaching preferences will test to see if the employees' level of

work experience has an influence on preferences for coaching behaviors.

The expected relationship between the two variables is derived from Hersey and Blanchard's (1977) Situational Leadership model, which proposes a more task-oriented leadership style for an employee with minimal experience. Conversely, an employee with more experience requires less of a task-oriented style and more of a style focused on providing emotional support. Applying the model to coaching behaviors, employees with less experience on the job will need more performance and development based coaching to develop the required skills for enhanced performance. Employees with more experience on the job will not need as much performance or development coaching, but instead will be more interested in the behaviors associated with building and maintaining working relationships. The predicted relationship between preferences and level of experience is based on the assumption that the model accurately reflects the leadership needs of employees, and more importantly, employees' awareness of these needs will influence their preference for coaching behaviors. This being the case, the final hypothesis to be tested is as follows:

Hypothesis 3 – Employees with fewer years of experience will have stronger preferences for coaching behaviors related to employee development and on-the-job performance, and less of a preference for relationship based coaching behaviors as compared to employees with more years of experience.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 69 employees within a software division of a high-technology company located in Mountain View, California completed the survey. The survey was distributed to 100 employees with a response rate of 77%; however, eight of the surveys could not be used because the instructions for completing the survey were not properly followed. The sample consisted of 55% male ( $n = 38$ ) and 45% female ( $n = 31$ ), and the average age of the employees was 36 years of age. The respondents ranged in age from 23 to 60 years. The average years of experience among the employees was 9.08 years. Of the 69 employees, 49% were in a technical position ( $n = 34$ ) and 51% were in a non-technical position ( $n = 35$ ).

### Description of Survey Instrument

The first section of the survey contained a list of 12 items each describing a behavior related to coaching (see Appendix A). These items were designed to measure the subject's preference for coaching behaviors. Three sub-scales made up of four items each were created from the 12 items. The first sub-scale contained behaviors focused on establishing a solid working relationship between employee and coach. An example of the type of behavior found in this sub-scale is the item, "promotes a working relationship that is based on mutual trust and respect". The second sub-scale involved behaviors focused on employee development, and an example item is "assists you in identifying opportunities to build new skills". The final sub-scale dealt with behaviors related to employees' on-the-job performance. An example for this sub-scale is "identifies and

defines clear parameters of success on the job”.

The instructions on the survey asked employees to rate the level of importance for each behavior following a forced distribution of ratings. A forced distribution of ratings was used to ensure a minimal level of variability was achieved within the employees' responses. A rating of 1, 2, 3, or 4 represented the possible responses for each item, where “1” reflected the most important behaviors. Employees were instructed to select only three behaviors for each rating. Therefore, a rating of “1” was assigned to only three behaviors, a rating of “2” was assigned to only three behaviors, and so forth. The second section of the survey consisted of eleven demographic questions where the respondents were asked to answer questions related to gender, age, type of position, years of work experience, and gender of manager (see Appendix B).

#### Procedure

The collection of the data for this study was originally gathered within a software division of a Fortune 500 company to aid in the design and development of management training workshop. The survey questionnaire was distributed by the Human Resources Department to all employees within the division through the company's inter-office mail system. The employees were asked to voluntarily complete the survey over the course of the next seven days and to then return the hard copy through inter-office mail. Every employee received the same survey with an identical set of instructions for completing the survey. Employees were informed in the cover sheet accompanying the survey as well as on the survey itself that the data collected from the survey would be anonymous. For this reason, employees were instructed not to include their name anywhere on the survey or

the inter-office envelope. The anonymity of all employee responses was also ensured through the use of a coding system that was used when the Human Resources Department received the surveys.

## Results

Descriptive statistics for each of the individual coaching behaviors were calculated for both male and female employees. Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations for each coaching behavior for male and female employees. The behaviors are categorized within the three sub-scales. One trend that emerged was that the most important behavior for both men and women was the same relationship behavior; “promotes a working relationship that is based on mutual trust and respect”. As the top behavior for both genders, men had a mean score of ( $M = 1.89$ ) and the mean score for women was ( $M = 1.54$ ). The same performance behavior, “recognizes the accomplishments of your performance”, turned out to be the second most important behavior for both men ( $M = 1.97$ ) and women ( $M = 1.74$ ). Consistent for both genders, the development related behavior, “helps you choose specific development goals,” was the least important coaching behavior. The mean score for men was ( $M = 3.42$ ) and ( $M = 3.29$ ) for women for this particular behavior.

The overall means and standard deviations on the three coaching sub-scales for male and female employees are presented in Table 2. All three of the coaching variables

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Coaching Behaviors for Male and Female Employees

Coaching Behaviors	Male (n = 38)		Female (n = 31)	
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)
<u>Relationship Sub-scale</u>				
Knows what is important to you	2.74	(1.16)	2.94	(1.03)
Establishes an open relationship with his/her employees	2.18	(1.14)	2.48	(1.06)
Displays a genuine interest in supporting you as a person	2.71	(1.18)	3.03	(1.02)
Promotes a working relationship that is based on mutual trust and respect	1.89	(1.03)	1.55	(0.89)
<u>Development Sub-scale</u>				
Helps you to choose specific development goals	3.42	(0.86)	3.29	(0.86)
Assists you in identifying opportunities to build new skills	2.58	(1.06)	2.90	(1.01)
Delegates projects to you to help you learn and develop new skills	2.08	(1.00)	2.52	(1.12)
Actively works with you to broaden your knowledge, skills, and abilities for future growth	2.66	(1.07)	2.32	(1.19)
<u>Performance Sub-scale</u>				
Challenges you to think of new and better ways to perform the job	2.61	(1.08)	2.87	(1.09)
Identifies and defines clear parameters of success on the job	2.55	(1.08)	2.19	(1.08)
Recognizes the accomplishments of your performance	1.97	(0.94)	1.74	(0.68)
Helps you enhance your performance by providing specific feedback on your work	2.61	(1.05)	2.16	(1.00)

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Coaching Sub-scales based on Employee Gender

Coaching Sub-Scale	Gender			
	Male (n = 38)		Female (n = 31)	
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)
Relationship	9.53	(2.47)	10.00	(2.27)
Development	10.74	(2.37)	11.03	(2.21)
Performance	9.74	(1.70)	8.97	(1.70)

indicated acceptable variance. Males had a slightly lower mean score for relationship behaviors ( $\underline{M} = 9.53$ ) compared to performance behaviors ( $\underline{M} = 9.74$ ). The opposite was found to be true for females, where the mean score for relationship behaviors ( $\underline{M} = 10.00$ ) was higher than the performance behaviors ( $\underline{M} = 8.97$ ). Both males and females showed less of a preference for the development behaviors compared to the other two types of coaching behaviors. The mean scores for males and females on the development sub-scale were ( $\underline{M} = 10.74$ ) and ( $\underline{M} = 11.03$ ) respectively.

To test the first hypothesis a paired sample t-tests were performed to analyze male employees' preferences for coaching behaviors. It was hypothesized that men would have a stronger preference for coaching behaviors related to performance as opposed to behaviors linked to relationships and development. Using the .05 probability level of significance, no significant differences were found between the male employees' mean scores for the three sub-scales: relationship - development  $\underline{F}(1,37) = -1.65$ ,  $p = .11$ ; relationship - performance  $\underline{F}(1,37) = -.37$ ,  $p = .71$ ; development - performance  $\underline{F}(1,37) = 1.87$ ,  $p = .07$ . These results do not support part one of the first hypothesis.

The same analysis was conducted to study the females' preferences for coaching behaviors to test the second part of the first hypothesis, which predicted that female employees would have a stronger preference for relationship behaviors over the other two types of coaching behaviors. The paired sample t-tests comparing the mean scores for the



relationship sub-scale and the other two sub-scales did not produce significant results: relationship-development  $F(1,30) = -1.39, p = .18$ ; relationship-performance  $F(1,30) = 1.72, p = .10$ . Although the results obtained did not support part two of the first hypothesis, a significant result between the performance and development sub-scale did emerge,  $F(1,30) = 3.55, p = .001$ . This result reflects that women prefer coaching behaviors related to performance ( $M = 8.97$ ) over coaching behaviors focused on development ( $M = 11.03$ ).

To test the second hypothesis, men would have a stronger preference than women for coaching behaviors related to performance, and women would have a stronger preference than men for coaching behaviors related to relationships, an independent t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores for each of the coaching sub-scales (see Table 2 for mean scores). All three t-tests revealed non-significant results: relationship  $F(1,67) = -.82, p = .41$ ; development  $F(1,67) = -.53, p = .60$ ; and performance  $F(1,67) = 1.87, p = .07$ . It is worth noting that the difference between males and females on the performance sub-scale approached significance [ $F(1,67) = 1.87, p = .07$ ]. However, even if a significant result did occur, it was not anticipated that women would have a lower mean score than men for the performance sub-scale.

The final hypothesis analyzed the effect of employees' level of experience on preferences for coaching behaviors. It was hypothesized that employees with fewer years of experience would have a stronger preference for coaching behaviors related to

performance and development, and less of a preference for relationship based coaching behaviors as compared to employees with more years of experience. The employees were divided into three groups in order to test this hypothesis. In an attempt to evenly distribute the employees based on years of experience, the following three groups were created: group 1 ( $n = 29$ ) – employees with 5 or less years of experience; group 2 ( $n = 20$ ) – employees with 6 to 10 years of experience; and group 3 ( $n = 20$ ) – employees with over 10 years of experience. The average years of experience for each group were as follows: group 1 ( $M = 3.30$ ), group 2 ( $M = 7.71$ ), and group 3 ( $M = 18.85$ ). The overall means and standard deviations on the three coaching sub-scales for each of the three groups of employees are presented in Table 3.

The mean scores across the three groups were compared by using an univariate analyses of variance in order to determine if the differences in mean scores were significant. Using the .05 probability level of significance three ANOVAs were performed to look at each of the coaching sub-scales. Although the lower mean scores obtained by the less experienced employees on the development and performance sub-scales were consistent with the third hypothesis, the non-significant results produced by the ANOVAs indicated that there is no difference between the three groups of employees in terms of their preference for performance coaching behaviors [ $F(1,66) = 2.56, p = .09,$ ] or

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Coaching Sub-scales based on Employee Level of Experience

<u>Coaching Sub-Scale</u>	Years of Experience					
	0 – 5 yrs. (n = 29)		6 – 10 yrs. (n = 20)		10+ yrs. (n = 20)	
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	M	(SD)
Relationship	10.41	(1.90)	10.10	(2.53)	8.40	(2.39)
Development	10.62	(1.86)	10.30	(2.70)	11.80	(2.24)
Performance	8.97	(1.61)	9.60	(1.67)	9.80	(1.91)

development coaching behaviors [ $F(1,66) = 1.60, p = .21$ ]. A significant difference was found between the three groups for the relationship sub-scale [ $F(1,66) = 5.14, p = .008$ ]. Given that the ANOVA revealed a significant difference between the three groups on the relationship sub-scale, a multiple comparison procedure was conducted. The Tukey tests indicated that the employees with 10 or more years of experience were significantly different from the other two groups of employees. Based on this significant result, it is accurate to state that employees with 10 or more years of experience had a stronger preference for coaching behaviors related to relationships as compared to the employees with under 10 years of experience.

For exploratory purposes, paired sample t-tests were conducted to determine if any level of significance existed between the mean scores for employees within each group. Significant results were obtained in the comparison of the relationship sub-scale ( $M = 10.41$ ) and performance sub-scale ( $M = 8.97$ ) [ $F(1,28) = 2.60, p = .02$ ], and the development sub-scale ( $M = 10.62$ ) and performance sub-scale for the employees with five or less years of experience [ $F(1,28) = 3.05, p = .01$ ]. The remaining comparison between the relationship sub-scale and development sub-scale was not significant [ $F(1,28) = -.33, p = .75$ ]. Based on these results, employees with five or less years of experience appear to have a stronger preference for performance related coaching behaviors compared to the other two types of coaching behaviors. The differences between the means for the middle group, employees with 6 to 10 years of experience, did not generate any level of

significance: relationship – development  $F(1,19) = -.18, p = .86$ ; relationship – performance  $F(1,19) = .67, p = .51$ ; development – performance  $F(1,19) = .85, p = .41$ .

The difference between the mean scores for the employees with 10 or more years of experience did produce significant results in the following two analyses: relationship – development  $F(1,19) = -3.60, p = .002$ ; performance – development  $F(1,19) = 2.63, p = .02$ . A non-significant result was obtained when the means for the final two sub-scales were tested, relationship – performance  $F(1,19) = -1.69, p = .11$ . These results revealed that employees with 10 or more years of experience preferred both performance coaching behaviors ( $M = 9.80$ ) and relationship coaching behaviors ( $M = 8.40$ ) over development coaching behaviors ( $M = 11.80$ ).

## Discussion

### Summary and Interpretation of Findings

The primary purpose of this study was to explore employee preferences for coaching behaviors and determine if different preferences existed between employees based on gender and level of experience. The first two hypotheses each addressed the aspect of gender. The initial thought was that male and female employees' preferences for coaching behaviors would be consistent with traditional sex-role stereotypes, and as such, women would display a stronger preference for relationship based coaching behaviors and men would display stronger preferences for performance based behaviors. Part one of the first hypothesis tested to see if male employees have a stronger preference for performance

coaching behaviors compared to coaching behaviors related to relationships and development. The data did not support this aspect of the hypothesis, which indicates that the male employees do not prefer performance related coaching behaviors to the other types of coaching behaviors. In fact, no significant differences were found between any set of coaching behaviors for the male employees.

Part two of the first hypothesis predicted that female employees will display a stronger preference for relationship based coaching behaviors compared to coaching behaviors related to performance and development. The results did not support this part of the hypothesis as well, which means the women employees do not prefer relationship based coaching behaviors to the other types of coaching behaviors. However, when testing this aspect of the hypothesis, it was discovered that women had a stronger preference for performance behaviors compared to development behaviors. This suggests that the women employees place more importance on coaching behaviors that will help them perform the job as opposed to coaching that is focused on employee development. Interestingly, this was the result expected for the male employees.

The second hypothesis predicted male employees would express a stronger preference than female employees for performance coaching behaviors, and female employees would express a stronger preference than male employees for relationship based coaching behaviors. No differences were found between male and female

employees with regards to their preferences for coaching behaviors. Since no gender differences emerged, both parts of the second hypothesis were rejected. Although the results did not support the second hypothesis, an interesting result emerged. Women had a lower mean score compared to the men's mean score on the performance sub-scale, and the difference between the means was close to a .05 level of significance. These mean scores on the performance sub-scale were the exact opposite of what was expected, which further dismisses the sex role stereotype premise used to develop both of the gender-related hypotheses.

The overall results addressing the gender issue offer no conclusive evidence that men and women differ in terms of their preferences for coaching behaviors. These results are similar to what has been found in other gender-related research; specifically the research designed to study gender differences in actual leadership behaviors. It has been found that there are no significant differences between male and female managers with regards to the way they manage (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Statham, 1987; Winther & Green, 1987). Research exploring the effects of gender on leadership styles offers little support that women and men lead in ways consistent with traditional sex role stereotypes (Powell, 1990). According to Shimanoff and Jenkins (1991), "Research has demonstrated that there are far more similarities than differences in the leadership behaviors of women and men, and they are equally effective" (p. 504).

The third and final hypothesis explored the relationship between employee preferences and years of experiences. It was hypothesized that employees with fewer years of experience would have a stronger preference for coaching behaviors related to performance and development, and less of a preference for relationship based coaching behaviors as compared to employees with more years of experience. The results showed that employees' level of experience only influenced preferences for relationship based behaviors, and not for behaviors related to performance or development. The mean scores conveyed that employees with 10 or more years of experience had a significantly stronger preference than employees with less than 10 years of experience for relationship based coaching behaviors.

One of the underlying assumptions of the Situational Leadership model is that employees' supervisory needs are dependent on their level of experience. According to this model, the most appropriate managers for employees with relatively low maturity levels as defined by their level of job related experience are managers who provide direction and structure. Based on the analysis of the preferences for just the employees with 5 or less years of experience, it was found that these employees did have a significantly stronger preference for performance behaviors compared to both the relationship and development based behaviors. However, the findings showed that preferences for coaching behaviors related to on-the-job performance were not



significantly different across the three groups of employees with varying levels of experience. Although employees with less experience do not have a stronger preference than more seasoned employees for performance coaching behaviors, employees with less experience do seem to view the performance coaching behaviors as more important relative to the other types of coaching behaviors. Applying this finding to the situational leadership model, it appears that the preferences for coaching behaviors held by the more junior employees offers some support to leadership style prescribed by the model.

The Situational Leadership model appears to be more applicable when it comes to explaining the second part of the third hypothesis. Baron and Greenberg (1990) point out that as employees gain maturity and master their jobs their need for emotional support increases, and when employees reach full maturity the manager's supervisory actions in many respects become superfluous. Accordingly, within the realm of a coaching style of management, it was expected that senior employees would have a stronger preference for relationship based coaching behaviors compared to junior employees. The results revealed that employees with 10 or more years of experience did display a significantly stronger preference than the less experienced employees for the behaviors associated with the relationship sub-scale. Plus, the analysis of the mean scores for just the employees with 10 or more years of experience showed that they had a stronger preference for the relationship behaviors compared to the development behaviors. Given the level of

experience for these employees, it is not unrealistic to expect their need for direction to be relatively low. This offers a possible explanation as to why experienced employees appear to be more concerned with the relationship aspect of coaching compared to employees with less experience.

Despite the usefulness of the Situational Leadership model to help explain the results from this study, the extent to which the results may be generalized can only be established through further research conducted in a variety of settings. The setting for this particular study may offer some additional insights to help explain the results. First, the nature of the work performed by many of the employees may have influenced their preference for on-the-job coaching. Although employees were not asked to provide a specific job title, one of the demographic questions did categorize employee positions as either technical or non-technical, and approximately half of the employees indicated they were in a technical position. The vast majority of the technical positions within the company are software related, such as Software Engineers, Software Quality Engineers, and Software Application Consultants. The job responsibilities for these types of positions typically involve a great deal of programming and coding, which often requires the employee to work alone without much interaction with managers and coworkers. Additionally, the nature of this type of work provides employees with efficient ways to determine their own level of productivity based on the amount of code produced, and the

quality of their work through the functionality of the code (Sonnentag, 1995). In essence, these types of technical positions have built in feedback mechanisms that are readily available to the employee and require limited involvement by management. In this type of a situation the employee's need for coaching may be significantly reduced, especially if the employee has a high level of competence. As a result, the technical employees in this study may have expressed a stronger preference for relationship based coaching behaviors as opposed to performance coaching behaviors simply because they had less of a need for performance related coaching.

A second factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the company's organizational culture and its philosophy on coaching in general and employee development in particular. The mean scores for the development sub-scale were higher than the mean scores for the performance and relationship sub-scales for all employees, regardless of the employees' gender or level of experience. Plus, the development related coaching behaviors were found to be significantly less important than the performance coaching behaviors for the female employees, employees with five or less years of experience, and employees with 10 or more years of experience. It may be possible that the company's beliefs around employee development influenced the employees' preferences for coaching behaviors, especially preferences for the behaviors related to employee development.

An assessment of the formal programs and policies the company has in place related to employee development suggests that the organization is committed to employee development. For example, the company provides a tuition reimbursement program for all employees, which offers up to \$8,000 per year to help cover the costs for tuition and books. The corporate training organization offers an employee training program specifically designed to help employees generate their own development plans. Also related to the training organization, the company has a development policy in place requiring all employees to take a minimum of 40 hours of training each year. Plus, as part of the annual performance review process, managers are required to complete a performance appraisal for every employee, which contains a section, dedicated to documenting employee development objectives.

It is possible that if these programs and policies are effectively utilized within the organization, employees might have viewed the coaching behaviors related to development as less important relative to the other behaviors because they feel that their development needs are already being addressed. Additionally, employees' may feel that the ultimate responsibility for employee development resides with the employee.

According to Peterson and Hicks (1996) many organizations provide resources and opportunities to help facilitate employees' development efforts, but it is the employees who own their development and determine how they want to develop. If the employees

who participated in this study share in this belief, it helps to explain why the employees expressed less of a preference for coaching behaviors focused on employee development.

### Evaluation of the Study

Certain key factors need to be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings generated from this study. First, it is important to keep in mind that the data was collected from a limited sample size ( $n = 69$ ). Furthermore, the variables used to study employee preferences, gender and years of experience, resulted in smaller sample sizes for each group involved in the statistical analysis. For example, the analysis on just the female employees' preferences consisted of a sample of only 31 subjects. The necessary caution introduced by the limited sample size is the fact that the T-statistic and F-statistic used in this study is directly related to sample size. With a larger sample size these statistics are more sensitive to differences in mean scores, even if the mean scores do not change when additional subjects are added.

A second factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the design of the survey instrument. Although a coaching style of management is typically viewed as a positive management style, the survey's response format used in this study did not allow employees to rate the coaching related behaviors as unimportant or undesirable. The downside created by this methodology is the limited ability to draw certain conclusions from the data. For example, it may be the case that none of the coaching behaviors were

important to employees, but because of the response format used to collect the data it is impossible to derive this conclusion. A Likert-type format or a ten-point scale represents two alternate response formats that may have produced more meaningful data. However, one of the inherent risks with these alternate forms is obtaining results that are skewed in either a positive or negative direction and offers little or no variation among subjects.

Whereas, one of the benefits of the forced distribution of ratings approach was that it guaranteed a minimal level of variability in the responses. It would be beneficial for future research to consider the utilization of a different survey design.

#### Future Research

One way to expand beyond this exploratory study will be to study the impact of a coaching management style on key organizational variables, such as employee performance, job satisfaction, or organizational commitment. The findings from this study offers insight into what coaching behavior employees consider most important relative to other behaviors. These results can help establish a foundation for future researchers interested in the area of coaching, and can assist them in formulating more significant research questions. What types of employees and organizations can benefit most from a coaching style of management? Are employees who receive coaching more committed to their organizations compared to employees who do not receive coaching? Does an employee's competence level impact a manager's coaching effectiveness? A broad range

of research opportunities exists within the field of coaching, and questions such as these reflect the types of potential research yet to be conducted.

### Conclusion

In summary, the findings from this study offer two main insights important to research practitioners, managers, and human resource professionals. First, it is clear from the results that the male and female employees did not have significantly different coaching preferences. As such, it is important for managers to take this into consideration and not let the prevalence of sex-role stereotypes influence their style of management. The results clearly indicate why managers' should not tailor their coaching style based on employees' gender. Instead, managers need to be sensitive to the individual needs of employees, which can not be determined based on the gender of an employee. Leader effectiveness is influenced by the leader's ability to lead in a way consistent with the employees' needs, expectations and preferences for leadership. As the gap widens between the type of leadership a manager provides and the type of leadership employees' want, there is an increased likelihood that issues such as a decrease in employees' job satisfaction and a loss in employee productivity will surface (Singer & Singer, 1990).

The second key insight stems from the differences in preferences that emerged among the employees based on years of experience. The results indicate that a relationship does exist between employee preferences and an employee's level of

experience. As the years of experience increased, the type of coaching behaviors the employees' valued shifted from behaviors focused on performance to behaviors focused on relationships. The important point these findings raise is that managers need to recognize that employee values may change over time. Research conducted by Meglino, Ravlin & Adkins (1991) looked at employees' satisfaction with management through an assessment of work values. The results from the study support the notion that value congruence between an employee and manager will have a positive impact on manager – employee relations and employee satisfaction with the manager. Again, managers need to be sensitive to the needs of employees and risk making assumptions about employee preferences for coaching behaviors based on gender or level of experience.



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## Appendix A

### SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The statements listed below describe different types of behaviors often associated with a “coaching” style of management. This survey is designed to assess employee preferences for different coaching behaviors. The data collected from this study will be anonymous and the information used in the development of a management development workshop. Please complete the survey using the instructions below.

**Instructions:** To complete the survey you will follow a forced distribution of ratings. Forcing you to distribute your ratings maximizes information about the relative importance of the various coaching behaviors.

Mark a **1** next to the **three behaviors** you consider to be the most important compared to the other behaviors

Mark a **2** next to the **three behaviors** you consider to be the 2nd most important compared to the other behaviors

Mark a **3** next to the **three behaviors** you consider to be the 3rd most important compared to the other behaviors

Mark a **4** next to the remaining three behaviors, which should be the **least important** compared to the other nine behaviors

**REMEMBER:** Although all of the behaviors listed are typically perceived as positive management behaviors, a rating of 4 does not mean the behavior is unimportant. A four rating simply means a particular behavior does **not** have the same level of importance relative to the other behaviors.

**How important is it to you to have a manager who.....**

- \_\_\_\_\_ knows what is important to you
- \_\_\_\_\_ helps you to choose specific development goals
- \_\_\_\_\_ challenges you to think of new and better ways to perform the job
- \_\_\_\_\_ establishes an open relationship with his/her employees
- \_\_\_\_\_ assists you in identifying opportunities to build new skills
- \_\_\_\_\_ identifies and defines clear parameters of success on the job
- \_\_\_\_\_ displays a genuine interest in supporting you as a person
- \_\_\_\_\_ delegates projects to you to help you learn and develop new skills
- \_\_\_\_\_ recognizes the accomplishments of your performance
- \_\_\_\_\_ promotes a working relationship that is based on mutual trust and respect
- \_\_\_\_\_ actively works with you to broaden your knowledge, skills, and abilities for future growth
- \_\_\_\_\_ helps you enhance your performance by providing specific feedback on your work

## Appendix B

**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS**

**Please read each question and mark or write the appropriate response.**

What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you worked for your current company? \_\_\_\_\_

What type of position are you in? \_\_\_\_\_ Technical (engineering)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Non-technical (non-engineering)

How long have you been in your current position? \_\_\_\_\_

How many years of work experience do you have in your current profession? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your manager's gender? \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

Roughly, what % of your professional career have you reported into a **male** manager? \_\_\_\_\_%

Roughly, what % of your professional career have you reported into a **female** manager? \_\_\_\_\_%  
= 100 %

Do you prefer a male boss or a female boss? \_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_ Doesn't matter

Are you currently a first line manager for any employees? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No



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Appendix C

TO: Brian Hall

FROM: Nabil Ibrahim,   
AVP, Graduate Studies & Research

DATE: January 24, 2001

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request for exemption from human subject's review under category "D" in the study entitled:

"Employee Preferences for Coaching Behaviors."

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project or the subject's data collected for the research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, unless they are serving as a primary source, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Nabil Ibrahim, Ph.D., immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted. This approval is granted for a one-year period and data collection beyond January 24, 2002 requires an extension request.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.